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Jonathan D. Smele, ed. *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918-1920.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. xix + 759 pp. $69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-57335-1.

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Historians have produced a plentiful literature on Civil War in Russia over the last four decades. And as an outstanding event in Russia's modern history, the years of 1917-1922 with all their political, ideological, socioeconomic dimensions–not to mention the psychological impact–evoke more than academic debates about the genesis and implications of this muddled web of cataclysms. They left an imprint on the participants in fratricide–hardly any Russian family which did not mourn a victim–as the Revolution and Civil War destroyed kindred and friendship. Between the decline of the ancien regime and the rise of a new regime, people lost their social bearings. With such a problem, the different political factions–from the Bolsheviks, SR to the Kadets and White generals–had to act, and its solution would decide the fate of each political conception. The civil war of 1917-1921 has been sometimes compared with the *Time of Troubles* in medieval Russia. One of the prominent White Generals, Anton Denikin, entitled his memoirs *Ocherki russkoi smuty* (Paris-Berlin, 1921-1926, 5 volumes). And indeed, despite the distance of time, there are similarities, besides foreign intervention, between the above mentioned cataclysms.

Whereas the older historiography predominantly focused on the events in the Russian capitals of St. Petersburg and Moscow, recent scholarship beginning with the key mid-1970s works of Oliver Radkey and Peter Kenez has moved more and more to the Revolution and Civil War at the periphery of the former Russian Empire. [1] These outlying regions–from the Baltic, Ukraine, and Caucasus to Siberia and the Russian Far East–were a kind of playing field for the heterogeneous and therefore opalescent anti-bolshevik movements. In this context, it is better not to use the term *counter-revolution* , because it smacks of a typical Bolshevik stereotype, too often uncritically adopted by Western historiography (as well as in this book). *Counter-revolution* assumes that there was a clear political program of the Whites as counter to Lenin's which in reality did not exist. Moreover, the term blurs the differences among the Whites. Whereas the SRs in principle supported the idea of a *revolution*, though not under the one-party dictatorship of the Bolsheviks, the Kadets and the Generals were far from being *revolutionaries*. Instead, they intended a *restoration* of the old pre-revolutionary order. As to these objections, the term *anti-Bolshevik* movements fits better.

If it is difficult to find an appropriate appellation for the White phenomenon, this still is due in a greater extent to their politics, which seemed inconstant and restless. Three factors contribute to this White dilemma: 1) the above-mentioned disagreements among factions, 2) geographic location, 3) foreign intervention. Whereas the periphery facilitated the cooperation with the Allied Interventionists, it simultaneously involved the Whites, who as the old elite were accustomed to central administration, in the web of regionalism and its special political and social local conditions. Regionalism itself was an opalescent phenomenon in Civil War too, comprising peasants, cossacks, and nationalities. This tension between centralism and regionalism was an outstanding factor, which finally led to the crushing of the White *anti-bolshevik* movements. And the vast lands of Siberia, Russia's backyards, were the scene where this happened.

Jonathan Smele, lecturer in Russian History at the University of London, is a well-known expert on the Civil War in Siberia. A decade ago he published with David Collins (British Siberian Seminar, University of Leeds) valuable documentation on *Kolchak i Sibir': dokumenty i issledovania, 1919-1926* (White Plains, New York: Kraus International Publishers, 1988). This new volume–no less voluminous–again balances an analysis of Kolchak's twenty-six-month rule in Siberia with an excellent narrative that is addressed more to specialists than to students and general readers. Reading this fascinating book, which comprises over seven hundred pages and includes a seventy pages bibliography, one feels the strong impact of the forerunners in this field like John A. White, Canfield F. Smith, and Norman G.O. Pereira.[2]

Smele's study is predominately based on White pub-

lications (e.g. pamphlets, newspapers), which are stored in Western archives as the British War Office, the Public Records Office, the Hoover Institution, and the Regional Oral History Office at the University of California/Berkeley, with its inexhaustible mine of eyewitness accounts. Unfortunately, the rich material of the GARF (Gosudarstvenii Archiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii) in Moscow has not been taken into consideration. Although the author points out that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the study of the Whites and especially Kolchak attracted the interest of Russian scholars, he does not sufficiently deal with their revised view–except for some references to D. M. Zolnikov. [3] K.A. Bogdanov's work *Admiral Kolchak: biograficheskii povest'-khronika* (Moscow, 1993) is only briefly mentioned in the preface. Instead, a broad scope of Soviet literature from the 1950s to 80s is utilized, which should be regarded with caution, because of its one-sided perspectives and assessments.[4]

Civil War in Siberia essentially traces the rise and decline of Admiral Kolchak, Russia's Supreme Ruler, in his shrinking Siberian dominion which never became a springboard for the envisaged conquest of Russia. Smele examines the subject in six main chapters–framed by an introduction and a conclusion. The sections represent the gradual changes of White Power between 1918-1920 under the following apt headlines: 1) "The triumphal march of reaction" (10-107), 2) "The establishment of the Kolchak government" (108-182), 3) "'What Kolchak wants!': Military versus Polity in White Siberia" (183-326), 4) "Inside Kolchakia: From 'A Land of Milk and Honey' to 'The Dictatorship of The Whip"' (327-471), 5) "White Debacle" (472-550), and 6) "White agony" (551-667).

Before the *triumphal march of White reaction* reached the vastness of Siberia, the region was under Bolshevik rule between Fall 1917 and Summer 1918. As quickly as the Bolshevik Revolution had come to Siberia, it disappeared. Thanks to their guns, the Bolsheviks gained power in all large cities along the Transsiberian Railroad. But Bolshevism had never been rooted in the countryside, where the overwhelming majority of the population were peasants, sympathizers of the SRs. In Siberia a gentry did not exist as in European Russia. Siberian peasants were rich and satiated, as Lenin himself realized. In the November 1917 to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, Lenin's party only got 10 percent of the regional vote, whereas the SRs received between 55 percent (Irkutsk guberniia) and 85 percent (Tomsk guberniia), compared to a 37.3 percent SR share of the All-Russian vote. One should add that the Bolsheviks in Siberia were divided. There were those regionalists, who–because of the organizational weakness–demanded a cooperation with the SR and Mensheviks. On the other hand, the Leninists stood up for a strong centralism and a one-party rule. Therefore, these militants not only dispersed the Soviets in Siberia and the Russian Far East. Moreover, they threatened their Siberian comrades with disciplinary punishments, including expulsion.

The short prelude of Bolshevik power was interrupted by the insurrection of the Czechoslovakian Legion in summer 1918. The Czechoslovaks, controlling the ribbon of the Transsiberian Railroad, the nerve of Siberia, were the decisive factor that prepared th e ground for White rule in Siberia. The installation of their power, however, met with problems, not very unlike those faced by the Bolsheviks. Until November 1918 anti-Bolshevik governments were springing up like mushrooms all over Siberia. Except for endless palaver, an unification on the basis of a compromising political conception did not succeed.

>From the very beginning, the two rivaling White power centers, the SR-dominated, *Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly* (KOMUCH = KOMitet chleno v UCHreditel'nogo sobraniia) at Samara and the more right-wing, Kadets-dominated Provisional Siberian Government (PSG) at Omsk, were paralyzing each other. This Omsk-Samara divide finally led to Kolchak's coup d'etat on November 18, 1918. The immature democracy of the SRs, their lack of effective political and military organizations despite their impressive share in electoral support, and their furling by the Red Army were compelling reasons for the proponents of dictatorship to argue that democracy could not function under the circumstances of Civil War.

Even the Siberian autonomous movement ("oblastnichestvo") and its prominent advocates Potanin, Vologodskii and Serebrennikov gave up their dreams for the sake of centralism and soon became stalwarts of Kolchak, the "rescuer" from the Bolsheviks. During its few sessions, the Siberian Oblastnaia Duma (Sibobduma), summoned under the marvelous green-white flag (symbol for Siberian forests and snow), was never representative of Siberian society, except of some intellectuals, especially professors from the Tomsk University. In contrast to liberal Tomsk, Omsk was an appropriate breeding ground for conservatism. Here was the outpost of the centralist Petersburg bureaucracy, the stronghold of conservative Siberian Cossacks and business circles–the social strata which would support Kolchak's coup d'etat. Following Smele's argumentation, this event was to be expected.

The next three chapters are devoted to the inner life of

Kolchak's government in Siberia. From the very beginning, it had grave shortcomings. The inaugural proclamations of "support of law, freedom and democracy" appealed to a recognition by the Western Powers, especially Great Britain and the United States. Kolchak did realize that "the Allies want something said about democracy and the absence of reactionary intentions"; without such claims foreign aid was not available. So, there was a new constitution. The Council of Ministers, despite their lack of real power, still had the popular mandate of the Sibobduma as a pure substitute until a revocation of an All-Russian assembly. As to the official press, there was only a provisional dictatorship. It is striking that inside of Siberia no one believed in this makeshift.

The Kolchak government was faced with a multiple dilemma. First, the White Army was splintered by warlordism. Atamans like Semenov, Ungern-Sternberg did not recognize Kolchak's authority and gained the support of the Japanese, who followed their own strategic and economic motives in rivalry with the United States–an outstanding factor which still needs a deeper elaboration than in this book.[5] Secondly, the Council of Ministers never succeeded as an effective counter-check on the arbitrary military around Kolchak. Third, Kolchak himself never gained the stature of a dictator. He seemed to be a "dictator" against his own will. As Smele points out, the head of the British Military Mission in Siberia, Major-General Alfred Knox, and the Kadet Pepeliaev were the "king-makers" in the background.

Fourth, the "Supreme Ruler" relied on a camarilla of officers who had no interest in politics, even not in military affairs. On the contrary, they were "afraid to fight at the front" and preferred a "dolce vita" in Omsk. And enjoying the luxurious gardens and cafes, they lost the contact to the masses at and behind the front. In this context, the intrigues of Ivan Mikhailov, Kolchak's Minister of Finance or the so called "Siberian Borgia," played an outstanding role. He was one of those "advisers," who successfully built up a screen around Kolchak. So, it is not surprising that Kolchak "did not understand the complexity of the political system, the role of political parties, or the part of self-interest as a factor of government life," as Guins, Kolchak's administrative secretary, remembered later.[7] Or with sharper words, alluding to Kolchak's former career in the Russian Marine and as then explorer of the Northern Sea Route, Baron Budberg, Kolchak's Acting Minister of War in summer of 1919, judged: "A narrow sailor…absolutely ignorant of administration…he did not know life in its severe, practical application."[8] But this view is one-sided and does not do justice to Kolchak. How could he gain administrative skills behind a screen of his camarilla? It was the complacent military circle around him which finally provoked the failure of White Government in Siberia and in All-Russia.

The last two chapters provide the background of White failure in Siberia in the crucial months from July 1919 to January 1920. History sometimes smacks of irony. On July 1, 1919, the first anniversary of the inauguration of the Provisional Siberian Government in Omsk was celebrated with pomp. But at the same time, the dusk of White power in Siberia arose at the horizon of Civil War. The Red Army was trampling down Kolchak's troops in the West Siberian plains. Now, the Whites had to pay dearly for their long-standing reluctance to implement political and social reforms. Their realization of a necessary change came too late. Hated by the population because of the arbitrary requisitions of grain and soldiers, high taxation and corruption, White rule was a artificial creation in the Siberian remoteness, which could only exist thanks to Allied and Czechoslovakian support.

It was the great paradox that the Kolchak regime had only found supporters among foreigners, but not among the Russian population. At least, the Whites and Allies had strongly underestimated the organizational skill and military persistence of the Bolsheviks. Whereas the Czechoslovaks were eager to return to their newly established state and tired of their involvement in the dragging Russian Civil War, the Western Allies lost in summer 1919 their hope in Kolchak's survival. The Western governments had to consider the growing criticism at home, where the population and the parliaments demanded an end of the intervention, because of its high financial price. And it was Albert Knox, Kolchak's former "king-maker" during the days of coup d'etat of November 1918, who taciturnly commented in August 1919 on the "Supreme Ruler": "A Lost Case." In the next months, the White rule in Siberia dissolved in panic and agony. In January 1920, Kolchak was arrested by the SR Political Center in Irkutsk. The SR negotiated with the Bolsheviks on a coalition government to save their own skin. The price was the extradition of Kolchak to the Bolsheviks, who shot him on February 7, 1920. Neither the Allied Commanders like Knox nor the Czechoslovaks made the slightest arrangements to save the All-Russian Supreme Ruler. It was a tragedy of Kolchak that he was only a figure in the international power game and in the web of Inner Whites' intrigues. As quickly as Kolchak appeared on the stage of Civil War, he disappeared with the same rapidity. Kolchak was a "provisional phenomenon" like the "Provisional Siberian Government" in Omsk.

Smele presents a competent and masterly written insight into the emergence and decline of Kolchak and White Rule in Siberia with an extensive depth concerning the inner (political, economic, social) factors and the international implications. It is a valuable book over which no one with interest in the mechanism of Civil War in Siberia should pass.

Notes

[1]. Oliver H. Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Russia: A Study of the Green Movement in the Tambov Region, 1920-1921*, Stanford 1976; Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1918-19: The Defeat of the Whites*, Berkeley 1977; Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution, 1917-1921*, Oxford 1989; R.B. Spence, *White against Red in Uriankhai: Revolution and Civil War on Russia's Asiatic Frontier, 1918-1921*, Revolutionary Russia, vol. 6, 1993, no.1, pp. 97-120.

[2]. John A. White, *The Siberian Intervention*, New York 1950; Canfield F. Smith, *Vladivostok under Red and White Rule*, Seattle 1975; Norman G.O. Pereira, *White Power during the Civil War in Siberia (1918-1920): Dilemmas of Kolchak's "War Anti-Communism"*, Canadian Slavonic Papers, no.1, 1987, pp.2-19; *White Siberia: The Politics of Civil War*, Montreal, Kingston 1996.

[3]. D.M. Zolnikov et al. (eds.), *Klassy i politicheskie partii v Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii i grazhdanskoi voine v Sibiri*, Novosibirsk 1991.

[4]. Igor Naumov, *Grazhdanskaia voina na Dal'nem Vostoke v sovetskoi istoriografii serediny 1950–serediny 1980-e godov*, Irkutsk 1991.

[5]. To the present, there is only one comprehensive work of the Japanese historiography on Civil War and Japanese Intervention in Siberia: Hara Teruyuki, *Shiberia shuppei: kakumei to kansho, 1917-1922* [The Siberian Intervention: Revolution and Interven tion, 1917-1922]; Tokyo 1993.

[6]. G.K. Guins [Gins], *Sibir', soiuzniki i Kolchak: povorotnyi moment russkoi istorii, 1918-1920gg. (Vpechatleniia i mysli chlena Omskogo pravitel'stva)*, vol. 2, Peking 1921, pp. 368-369.

[7]. Baron A.P. von Budberg, *"Dnevnik"*, Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii, Berlin, vol. 15 (1924), pp. 331.

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